DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 065 EA 018 915

AUTHOR O'Connor, Patrick
TITLE Dropout Prevention Programs That Work.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
PUB DATE Dec 85
NOTE 40p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, Oregon School Study Council, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($4.00 prepaid; quantity discounts; $1.50 shipping and handling will be added on billed orders).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT OSSC Bulletin; v29 n4 Dec 1985

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alienation; *Continuation Students; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Family Influence; *High Risk Students; Peer Influence; Personality Problems; Prevention; School Effectiveness; *School Holding Power; Secondary Education; Socioeconomic Status; Truancy
IDENTIFIERS California; Colorado; Effective Schools Research; Oregon

ABSTRACT

Spurred by a national dropout rate of 25 percent, educators are examining causes of leaving school early, identifying high risk students, and devising student retention programs. This paper profiles the potential dropout, describes 10 characteristics of effective student retention programs, and describes three exemplary programs in Colorado, Oregon, and California. Recent research suggests that students drop out not on spur-of-the-moment decisions, but because of serious personality and environmental conflicts, including unsatisfactory family relationships, perceived "lower class" status, peer influence, and alienation from school. To identify these students, school staff rely on indicators such as truancy patterns and low grades and cumulative credits. Certain characteristics ensure retention program success: (1) early identification, (2) sound organization, (3) proper staff selection, (4) team approach, (5) specific focus, (6) careful student selection, (7) respected institutional role, (8) administrator flexibility, (9) community involvement, and (10) substance abuse awareness. Adequate funding is a must. Three voluntary programs, San Luis Valley Commission (Colorado), the Opportunity Center (Eugene, Oregon), and the Coca Cola Hispanic Fund (Los Angeles, California), exhibit these qualities and are providing many would-be dropouts with needed care and attention. Included are 16 references and a list of persons interviewed. A copy of the Opportunity Center's parent-student handbook is appended. (MLH)

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Dropout Prevention Programs That Work

ED275065

Patrick O'Connor

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December 1985
Vol. 29, No. 4

OSSC BULLETIN

ISSN 0095-6694

Individual Copy $4.00

Quantity Discounts:
10-24 copies - 15%
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Preface

Despite the concerted efforts of many educators, an unacceptably high number of secondary school students choose not to complete their education. Blame is being assigned to many different areas. A more productive course, however, is to examine the numerous influences affecting potential dropouts and see what some Oregon schools are doing to meet the needs of the alternative school student.

This month's Bulletin examines these students at risk. It also shares what educational practitioners and researchers have to say about creating effective student retention programs. Finally, the Bulletin describes three innovative programs that operate effectively with minimal school budget increases.

This Bulletin was written by Patrick O'Connor, an OSSC graduate research assistant. O'Connor is a doctoral student in the Division of Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon.

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

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Introduction

In the past twenty years, scant research has been devoted to a very pressing concern in education: student dropouts. This problem is especially pertinent to Oregon educators. Jerry Conrath, an independent consultant from Scappoose, Oregon, with over nineteen years of public high school teaching, reports that many Oregon high schools have a "staggering dropout rate": over 30 percent of those entering the ninth grade will not finish high school. Nationally, about one out of every four students fails to complete high school.

The social and economic costs of dropping out are getting even higher. In a tightening job market, many nongraduates are excluded from worthwhile positions and are more likely to become welfare recipients. Even more debilitating to the individuals who do not graduate from high school is the social stigma of failure that often becomes attached to dropouts. As Lisa Beck and Joseph A. Muia point out, the resulting "unhappiness, frustration, and hostility" often culminate in a "life tinged with failure."

To deal with this problem, several questions must be asked. Which students are most likely to drop out of high school? Why are they not finishing school? What are some characteristics of effective student retention programs? How are these programs implemented, and where will the district find the money to fund these programs?

In an attempt to find answers, this Bulletin cites recent studies reported in educational journals and presents discussions held with Oregon district and secondary school administrators. On the basis of this information, the Bulletin profiles the potential dropout in chapter 1 and describes ten characteristics of effective student retention programs in chapter 2. These characteristics can be seen in three retention programs profiled in chapter 3. It is hoped this Bulletin will give school officials pertinent information for establishing or improving their own student retention programs.

Why Students Drop Out and How to Identify Them

To help students stay in school, educators must recognize what causes students to leave high school early. It is also essential for all school personnel to be aware of dropout behavior. This chapter reviews what has been recently written about the potential dropout and what Oregon educators have discovered in their schools.

Profile of the Potential Dropout

Contrary to popular belief, students do not drop out as the result of spur-of-the-moment decisions. T. L. Millard suggests that the dropout is "a person with serious personality and environmental conflicts, rather than an immature personality who simply decides to walk away from his responsibilities." The frequency and severity of these conflicts appear to have a positive correlation with certain characteristics.

Relationship with Family

One of the most prominent features of a dropout's background is "an unsatisfactory relationship with his family" (Beck and Muia). According to a statistical study by L. Cervantes, "the dropout's family is less solid, less influenced by a father figure, less likely to interact in leisure activities, and less able to communicate than the graduate's family." J. Bachman and his colleagues report that dropouts experience a higher level of parental punitiveness than do graduates.

These factors coupled with a lack of family cohesion create a sense of insecurity with many students who eventually drop out. The absence of these rudimentary bonds hinders the learning process by engendering feelings of self-doubt.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status can also be considered an important factor in the dropout's background. One study reported by Cervantes illustrates that as socioeconomic status diminishes, the incidence of dropping out increases dramatically. A lack of adequate funds for education does not fully account for this correlation. Instead, "the exceedingly high dropout rate among the 'lower classes' (which are often composed largely of minorities)...is attributable to cultural differences...between these groups and the 'upper' classes" (Beck and Muia). Not being willing or able to conform to school's middle class values, 'lower-class' students are often in conflict with the curriculum, the teachers, and the other students. William Jones provides a good description of this dilemma:

> For these children, much of the cherished American dreams of equity, equality of educational opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness and material success are a cruel hoax. We do not provide the teaching and learning techniques, strategies, and programs that would compensate for (and offset) the handicaps that have been imposed upon them because of birth, historical circumstances, and chance environmental conditions.

Disillusioned by these disadvantages, many leave school.

Peer Influence

Influence from social contacts also plays a significant role in a student's decision to drop out. Those unhappy with the larger school environment form relationships with those who have similar dissatisfactions. These friendships perpetuate a cycle of dependency:

> Many of those people selected for reinforcement are likely to be dropouts or in the process of dropping out....Contact with these persons maximizes the probability that this dissatisfied adolescent will choose to quit school as a "solution" for feelings of insecurity and failure (Beck and Muia).

Les Smith, director of staff development for Greater Albany Public Schools, suggests that many future dropouts first become part of groups that have "low standards and are supportive by their non-demands." These peer groups often provide the "lost" student with a rationale for dropping out.

Low Level of Identification with School

Even if the potential dropout does not associate with other dropouts, this individual often has a low level of identification with or participation in school activities. According to Bob Stalick, associate superintendent of Eugene Public Schools, the students who feel they are not "fitting in" to their particular high school are in danger of dropping out. Dian Connett, chairman for the Tri-City Alternative Programs (a part of Clackamas Community College), agrees with this assessment:

> We interview all students coming into our programs to see what their frustrations are. A common answer to the question "Why didn't it work out in high school?" is "I was lost--there were too many kids at high school; I didn't feel like I belonged."

To discover who is not adapting to the school environment, researchers and educations have delineated some important indicators of students at risk.

Identifying Students at Risk

Most school districts have neither the staff nor the funds to assemble pertinent background information on each student. Instead, teachers, counselors, and administrators must rely on monitoring certain behaviors associated with dropouts. Victor T. Ross suggests one such indicator is a record of truancy or excessive absence from class.

Truancy Patterns

The correlation between student attendance and graduation is clearly illustrated in a recent study by the Eugene Public Schools: "Patterns of Graduation and Dropping Out in the Class of '84, District 4J." The author, Steven J. Schellenberg, draws this conclusion:

> The one variable which consistently emerges as the strongest predictor of graduation and overall performance in school is attendance. Grade 9 absences showed the strongest differences of any variables between the graduating and dropout groups.

From the results of data collected, Schellenberg tested this predictor by hypothesizing that those with ten or fewer absences in grade 9 will graduate and those with more than ten will drop

out. This "crude" breakdown correctly classifies over 68 percent of the sample, as the following figures dramatically illustrate:

	Dropouts	Graduates
10 or fewer absences	46	81
More than 10 absences	108	40

Schellenberg asserts that the strongest conclusion of his study may be that absenteeism in the ninth grade is a strong predictor of students at risk of dropping out.

Unfortunately, the use of this statistic to identify potential dropouts is not always reliable. According to one study, high school absenteeism is frequently "underreported" because of student deviousness, careless reporting practices, varying definitions of absence, and administrative concern for "appearances" and school reimbursements. The actual absence percentage may be even higher (Meyer and others; de Jung and Duckworth).

Another problem with relying on absence records as a primary indicator is that mere measurement of this variable does not address what the potential dropout has in mind. Researchers de Jung and Duckworth found that "only a small portion of those students who are continually absent consciously intend to leave school altogether." Apparently, many potential dropouts do not recognize the causal relationship between a high absentee record and a high failure rate. "Their continued absenteeism will almost certainly lead to failing grades in some courses or even to dropping out of school altogether, but this fact seems to be more a consequence than a choice" (de Jung and Duckworth).

Low Grades and Behind in Credits

Students at risk of dropping out tend to have lower grades and cumulative credits than the general student body. In his study of dropout patterns in Eugene schools, Schellenberg compiled a districtwide summary that shows the "dropout group was substantially lower than the graduate group in Overall GPA, English GPA, Average Credit and standardized Reading and Math scores from junior high." The findings (see table 1) illustrate the extent to which these records can be used in predicting potential dropouts.

A comparison of the means suggests that dropouts' GPAs are an average of 1.2 below graduate level and that dropouts are an average of 4 credits per term behind the graduating student. Having access to these figures could be helpful in pinpointing students needing immediate attention.

Table 1
Comparison of Dropout and Graduate Groups
on their Performance in Junior High School

Dropouts			Variable	Graduates		
n	Standard Deviation	Mean	School Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	n
208	.74	1.77	Overall GPA	3.01	.55	140
207	.81	1.47	English GPA	2.82	.73	139
206	4.10	14.32	Average Credit/Term	19.85	.93	140
126	17.07	57.58	Grade 9 Reading	65.79	16.92	121
130	15.53	48.65	Grade 8 Math	62.15	19.34	114

Ten Characteristics of Effective Programs

What are some characteristics of effective student retention programs? An analysis of recent research on student dropouts and discussions with Oregon teachers and administrators reveal practical insights into "what works" and "what doesn't work." The following ten characteristics stand out in effective student retention programs.

Early Identification

Early identification of potential dropouts and prompt remedial assistance are essential. Some studies suggest that by the third grade discernible patterns of academic success or failure become ingrained in the child. Because of our highly mobile population, traditional files often become misplaced. With each move to another location, a child's specific needs must once again be determined.

Effective student retention programs establish and maintain close contact with elementary and middle schools, so that the high school can supply consistent direction and help to the low achieving student. Some larger school districts, such as in Multnomah (Oregon) and Los Angeles Counties, have made extensive use of computers for student record analysis and community referral information.

Organization

Effective alternative schools require careful planning and comprehensive knowledge of available community resources. Time effectively spent in this area will help avoid confusion during implementation. One important feature suggested by various researchers is the integration of counseling into the academic program.

In an article titled "Education or Welfare," Suzanne T. Ryan suggests that school-based programs for pregnant students can be a key factor in breaking the cycle of dependency and in attaining a self-sustaining role in society. Offering the Austin, Texas, program as a good example of incorporating sound planning tech-

niques and relying on a broad base of funding, Ryan concludes her study on helping unwed teenage mothers avoid welfare with the following appeal to common sense:

> On a purely dollars-and-cents basis, one can easily support the concept of a well thought-out and executed program encompassing a full range of child care and professional care. The alternatives are simple. Society, through governmental and private sources, can provide the structure that will allow eighty-five percent of the affected teens to complete their education, thus breaking the cycle of dependency and making possible a meaningful, taxpaying role.... In the absence of a better alternative, it (well-run, well-planned alternative schools) provides in the long and short run the least expensive and most viable approach to dealing with pregnant teens and new unwed mothers.

In organizing a student retention program, administrators should be aware that careful planning is crucial, not only for program credibility, but also for community, state, and federal support.

A well-organized program should also take into account the many nuances of the adolescent psyche: one standard approach will simply not work with all students. Les Smith, director of staff development at Greater Albany Public Schools, warns teachers and counselors not to advise the potential dropout without first considering the students' background and circumstances:

> As a former junior high and high school principal, I've seen many cases where a student will suddenly announce his intentions of dropping out and get intensive counseling. Often this sudden declaration is merely an attention-getting device. Once teachers and counselors start treating this event seriously, the student's pride gets in the way, and he follows through with dropping out. I believe we shouldn't respond to students who talk of dropping out--we should reach them a lot earlier.

In essence, Smith maintains that good intentions alone will not meet the needs of students; a program that promotes timely intervention with appropriate responses to each individual student's situation is ultimately the most successful.

Staff Selection

Proper staff selection characterizes effective alternative programs. According to Don Jackson, principal of South Eugene High School, correct hiring is especially important for these

programs: "We look for teachers who are unafraid of and upbeat with the students. Most of these students have been hurt by the system and need teachers who will work with them." Jackson adds that he prefers teachers to "teach kids English" instead of "teaching English to kids"--the emphasis being on student learning instead of on subject mastery.

Recent research on effective schools supports Jackson's observations. In *The Good High School*, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot contends that teachers must have a "fearless and empathetic regard for students":

> Adolescence is a time of great vulnerability and turbulence; and high school students need secure and mature attention from adults, a firm regard that offers consistent support, realism, and certainty. One of the most striking qualities of these good schools is their consistent, unswerving attitudes towards students. The first impression is that teachers are not afraid of students. . . . It is not that some teachers do not feel threatened by eruptions of violence, or do not wisely protect themselves from physical assaults, but rather that most good high school teachers seem to be unafraid of these young people who tend to baffle and offend the rest of us.

Because potential dropouts tend to be among the most "unlovable" members of the student body, this "fearless regard" for students is a desirable trait for those teaching in alternative programs.

Lightfoot admits that "empathetic regard" is often confused with "something sentimental and soft." It is not that at all. Instead, this attitude is "often communicated through tough teacher criticism, admonitions, and even punishment." She believes that the empathetic stance is an essential part of successful interactions between students and teachers. Kaplan and Luck agree that this factor is significant: "The degree of teacher's empathy and rapport with disadvantaged students can be a crucial factor in the educational process."

Team Teaching and the "Buddy System"

The team teaching and buddy system approach are commonly employed by several successful retention programs. Many alternative education programs use team teaching as a way to provide more opportunities for one-on-one instruction. Dian Connett of Tri-City Alternative Programs shares some of the differences between her programs and traditional high school instruction:

> Instead of having traditional instructors in our programs, the faculty are called "advisors" who have

caseloads. Here, students can get individual tutoring, get help in setting goals, do small group exploration activities and work with adults.

An additional advisor in the classroom can help promote productive discussions, such as in the morning class meeting, where conflict resolution, survival skills, and other pertinent topics are discussed.

Whereas team teaching provides students with a stimulating cross-section of teaching approaches, the buddy system encourages students to develop productive relationships with individual teachers and other good role models. According to Lisa Beck and Joseph A. Muia, it is essential "for educators to demonstrate feelings of love and approval toward potential dropouts, letting them know they are valuable, important individuals". Kaplan and Luck maintain that "low-talk" empathetic counselors and teachers employing an indirect approach attain the highest gains in attendance. Establishing rapport on an individual basis with each student is a critical factor for the alternative school teacher.

Bob Stalick, assistant superintendent for Eugene Public Schools, comments that alternative schools will succeed if "we can provide what the high schools cannot." Traditional high schools do not always have the time, the resources, or the "culture" to meet the particular needs of potential dropouts.

Specific Focus

Effective alternative programs not only should be small enough in size to encourage individual help, but also should have a unique or specific focus. Dian Connett believes it is essential that an alternative program have its own identity: explicit expectations and goals. "This program can be built around any type of curriculum. It is much more important to show that you are reaching some finite goal."

Because the traditional goals and objectives of the high school are often too diffuse for the alternative student to appreciate, the alternative school should provide tangible goals (and expectations) for which students can strive.

Student Selection

The manner in which students become part of the alternative program can also be an important consideration in an effective program. Forcing students to take part in a program often creates resentment and turmoil. Research, as Victor T. Ross reports,

supports making alternative programs a choice, not a requirement.

Doug Vicory, principal of Portland's Parkrose High School, contends that students should demonstrate they will benefit from alternative programs: "We want people who can succeed and are willing to apply themselves." Students need to make a commitment to participate fully in the program if it is to help them finish high school. This commitment rarely comes as a result of ultimatums.

Role of the Institution

Although the alternative program may be geographically isolated from the main high school campus, the service it performs should be valued by the institution. Dian Connett cautions that alternative programs should "not be treated as a stepchild of the institution." An alternative program may serve only a small fraction of the general high school student body. Nevertheless, adequate funds for procuring appropriate facilities and hiring qualified teachers are essential to maintain the program's credibility in the eyes of the high school and the community.

Administrative Flexibility

Building and district administrators in high schools with effective student retention programs are usually willing to recognize the unique needs of those programs. They avoid making direct quantitative comparisons between traditional and alternative high school programs. Dian Connett maintains that administrative flexibility can be applied to student intake, budgeting, facilities, and so forth.

Administrators should recognize that alternative students usually require more hands-on activities, more personnel, and fewer supplies. Consequently, the alternative programs' budgets may not be comparable, line-by-line, with general high school budgets. Most importantly, she adds, administrators should avoid using quantitative measures, such as ADM (Average Daily Membership), that may not apply to certain community-based programs.

Community Involvement

A high degree of community involvement is also a hallmark of effective alternative programs. School-business partnerships not only get the private sector involved in the task of providing funds for student programs, but also help students apply academic learning to practical tasks. According to Don Jackson, partnerships between a school and local businesses provide another

opportunity for the students to "bond" to the school and the community: "It is particularly important that students remain active in areas that interest them, and these activities do just that."

South Eugene High School has an arrangement with Emporium stores, a local chain of department stores, to train a number of students in retail and merchandizing skills. This partnership has been so successful that it won the 1985 Association of School Business Officials' Partnership of the Year Award for large-size school districts (enrollment of 5,000 and greater). The journal reporting this award notes the relationship "was impressive for the 'paybacks' to the business partners for their concern and dedication" (Convention Reporter). Jackson reveals that a large part of establishing fruitful school-business partnerships is an administrative function: "You have to get out and sell, but it's worth it."

Dian Connett agrees that school-business partnerships, though potentially time-consuming for administrators, work very well. The Vocational Option Program--one of three alternative programs offered to high school students by Clackamas Community College (Tri-City Alternative Program)--is a good example of programs that help students reach stated educational goals through cooperative associations with local businesses. Connett helps place students at a college bookstore, a children's clothing outlet, and other retail stores. "At the bank, one employee will go through keeping checking accounts and other essential banking procedures for individual students." Both students and business people benefit from the experience.

Most school-business partnerships involve making initial contact, determining appropriate procedures, developing a list of "competencies" needed for carrying out each job, clarifying job expectations and responsibilities, and having students take part in interviews and in signing contracts. Connett attests that this step-by-step introduction to job duties motivates students and gets them involved.

Another example of a partnership is a seminar offered by Pacific Northwest Bell for ninth grade students. The seminar improves students' awareness of the job market and explains the importance of making informed decisions about use of their time. Called "Choices," the seminar was developed by PNB employee Gary Frizzell, whose experience with his teenage son led him to the conclusion that high school students need to become more aware about their alternatives. (U.S. West Educational Foundation now administers this program.)

Begun in January 1985, PNB's two-day seminar is offered throughout Oregon. According to Waynema Draper, educational relations coordinator for PNB, speakers from within the company

volunteer to speak to students about time management and aspects of life that individuals can and cannot control. Held during the same class period on consecutive days, the program explores "who I am" and "what I am" on the first day and looks into actions and consequences on the second day. As Draper points out, the seminar shows students that "the more education you have, the more options you have."

Although effectiveness of this short-term program has yet to be evaluated, most educators and students are enthusiastic about the program. The Beaverton School District, for example, reports that four of its intermediate schools have invited PNB to present "Choices" at their respective schools.

Substance Abuse Awareness

If potential dropouts resort to drug use, the task of motivating and educating these students becomes even more difficult, if not impossible. Educators and researchers agree that staff members of student retention programs should be particularly cognizant of substance abuse, especially by "at risk" students. Doug Vicory believes that Parkrose High School's Student Assistance Program has had a high success rate in making students aware of drug and alcohol problems and assisting those with present dependencies. As he points out, caring, instead of punitive, relationships with students are essential for this program.

Vicory cites the usefulness of a systematic referral process in which any teacher can start an examination process of a suspected student. A teacher noticing student behavior indicative of substance abuse can, in conjunction with a student's counselor, poll all the student's teachers for concurrence. With this observation system, students with drug problems can be quickly identified and receive needed assistance.

Three Exemplary Retention Programs

Besides paying heed to the characteristics of effective dropout programs, educators who wish to start their own programs can learn from the example of others. This chapter examines three programs with diverse origins, objectives, and settings. Each of these programs requires extensive time and effort, but each produces tangible results.

The San Luis Valley Commission in Colorado, the Opportunity Center in Eugene, and the Hispanic Education Fund in Los Angeles are vastly different programs that have particular relevance for Oregon educators. The San Luis Valley Commission has particular significance for smaller school districts.

San Luis Valley Commission

In a recent issue of *The American School Board Journal*, P. Bruce Uhrmacher, a former educational equity specialist, describes a useful step-by-step approach to improving retention programs. One of the poorest school districts in Colorado (North Conejos; K-12 enrollment 1,083) joined three other neighboring school systems to create a dropout prevention "commission." Uhrmacher's description of this commission and the procedures it followed, summarized in the following paragraphs, might be helpful for those who wish to establish a similar organization locally.

Five Completed Steps

The first step the commission's organizers took was to gather people interested in reducing the number of dropouts. This it did by placing an announcement in a local newspaper serving the four districts. The assembled group formed the San Luis Valley Commission, which, in turn, created an executive committee, elected officers, scheduled additional meetings, drafted a mission statement, and synthesized the following goals:

1. to seek funding for dropout prevention programs
2. to develop links with community agencies that can help schools in guiding teachers and youngsters to appropriate services
3. to identify and work with organizations that can help schools improve their academic environment
4. to prepare research and position papers on how schools, homes, and the community can fight the dropout problem

After creating the commission and agreeing upon goals, the next step was to find sources of support. Preferring to have money sent directly to school systems than to act as a clearinghouse, the San Luis Valley Commission solicited funds and services from several sources, including nearby colleges, the state alcohol and drug abuse division, regional desegregation assistance, and others.

The third step, finding out what needed to be done, was particularly important. Here, the San Luis Valley Commission scheduled general public meetings to discuss the causes of dropping out. Meeting participants became actively involved in small group discussions and came up with several solutions. This activity helped the commission isolate some local factors in dropping out that might not have been readily apparent by using a "blue ribbon" committee approach.

Fourth, getting students involved in retention efforts was essential for program survival. The four-district commission planned a followup workshop to give students time to develop specific projects within their schools. In this instance, students opted for peer tutoring programs "in which a student who is having school or home problems can talk with another youngster about what he's going through." Once one project is firmly established in the schools, trained workshop students will look for another dropout prevention activity.

Fifth, each school system needs to provide support for student programs. Uhrmacher contends that at least one adult sponsor from each participating school should attend each student conference. Adult presence and guidance keeps student projects "moving along" and promotes support for these projects within the schools. Presently, the San Luis Valley Commission is at this point.

Future Steps to Be Taken

The sixth and seventh steps--having the school system officially adopt student programs and expanding dropout prevention to other schools--have yet to be realized. Eventually, the "commission will transfer the actual work of assisting dropouts to

the school systems--but the commission will continue to support the programs through funding and services."

Starting Your Own Commission

For those interested in starting a dropout prevention commission locally, the San Luis Valley Commission offers three suggestions:

Start small. Begin with pilot projects in just a few schools. Says commission leader Mike Atencio: "See if you are doing a good job. If so, *then* go big."
Plan for the long term. Develop a long-range strategy that will last several years. The San Luis Valley Commission took almost two years to reach Step 5, for example.
Make the commission representative of the community. For credibility in the community, the commission should reflect the ethnic backgrounds of the population in your area and should include a good representation of men and women, boys and girls.

Because the commission works with the schools instead of assigning blame to these institutions, the cooperative relationship furthers local retention efforts. Atencio sums up an essential tenet of this community program: "We are all taking responsibility for the dropout problem."

Eugene's Opportunity Center

In Eugene, Oregon, the Opportunity Center is an alternative program in its fifteenth year. It has two components--one for those under age sixteen and one for older students. The program enables the older students to obtain either their high school diploma or a General Education Diploma.

The Opportunity Center (O.C.) helps students who fall into attendance, credit, and social difficulty in regular high school programs. Although some O.C. students eventually decide to return to their "mother" high school, most enrollees thrive in the family atmosphere at O.C. and stay until graduation or GED completion.

The Opportunity Center has produced a comprehensive publication that describes the history and purposes of the program, as well as school policies and rules (the bulk of it is reproduced in Appendix A). This handbook emphasizes that "a major goal [of this program] is helping students experience personal and social success." Jerry Blair, counselor at O.C., elaborates on how this goal is pursued:

> The staff attempts to provide opportunities for social development. We try to keep in mind that personal successes and friendships are key to getting students turned around. When students arrive here, many or most are not academically motivated. Having students work together on some tasks has worked in getting them involved and building their acceptance into the group.

As a result of this emphasis, a warm and caring environment prevails at the Opportunity Center. Stu Gillett, language arts teacher, believes that the casual and participatory management structure of the program keeps the staff working cooperatively. "The staff feel free to be themselves and let the students be themselves." To increase their accessibility to the students, staff are encouraged not to become identified with one subject. Instead, teaching *and* counseling are part of each staff member's responsibility. In fact, many staff members are "group leaders" who are "responsible for keeping track of attendance and progress for each student in their group."

Because of the school's small size (it serves about 100 students), problems can be dealt with immediately. Tom Owens, social studies and G.E.D. teacher, believes that timely intervention is an essential part of the program: "At a traditional high school, problems can go unnoticed for a long time; here, three or four teachers can focus on the problem of one student and work toward resolving this problem." Stu Gillett agrees:

> In the sense of sheer numbers, we can keep track of the students a lot better than regular high schools; for example, every staff member knows a majority of the students by their first names. If someone is acting out of character, we know quickly.

Because the staff insists upon honesty from themselves and students, many problems bothering students become readily apparent and do not await discovery.

Students attend classes at the Opportunity Center because they want to be there: the program is voluntary. Apparently, a majority of these students have decided to proceed with the program. According to Jerry Blair, 100 of the 124 students enrolled in the program at the beginning of the school year are still at the Opportunity Center. (Some of those 24 have moved out of the district.) Many of these students are making progress toward high school completion. Fifty students are on the waiting list.

There appears to be little quantitative evidence that would indicate what aspects of this program are most beneficial to students. The staff considers the social bonding emphasis to be a foremost attribute of this program. "If students can remember

this school as being a special place where they learned and made friends," says Stu Gillett, "this school has succeeded."

The Eugene Public Schools find that their retention efforts are most effective when initiated early in the students's career. Nevertheless, the district feels a responsibility to provide a second chance for those students who have "fallen through the cracks of the educational system." This program provides direction and individual attention for at risk students.

Coca Cola Hispanic Education Fund

Another method of garnering needed support for dropout prevention programs is to solicit funds from the private sector. The "Coca-Cola Hispanic Education Fund" is representative of this approach. The involvement of local businesses in student retention programs is an effective method of supplementing district funding.

This fund is "part of a four year $400,000 pilot education program designed to help Hispanic high school students complete their high school education." Although similar awards have been presented to other cities, such as New York, Miami, Chicago, and San Antonio, the most recent program (1984) has been established at two of Los Angeles's largest Hispanic high schools--Garfield and Roosevelt. These two schools have exceptionally high dropout rates.

Origins

The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Los Angeles became initially involved with these two schools two years ago when the local school district started the "Adopt-A-School Program." During these two years, the company sponsored career development days, job and college fairs, special assemblies, and academic scholarship programs. The fund is a further refinement of these efforts. According to the program description, the fund will enable Coca-Cola to "maximize the effectiveness of existing student support programs by directing needy students into programs at an early stage."

Overall Plan

The Los Angeles program attempts to identify students with academic and other problems before they enter senior high school as sophomores. Between 150-200 students in this category are included-- those with academic, attendance, economic, family, or other concerns. Once these students are identified, "Student Advocate" workers (teachers, counselors, and teacher aids) and

teams become responsible for their designated students' academic performance and attendance. The fund supports the team approach employed at Garfield High School and the "buddy system" approach used at Roosevelt High School. (The difference between these two emphases is discussed in the "Instructional Core" section of this chapter.)

Program Components

The fund-supported programs at Roosevelt and Garfield High Schools share certain features, including the three following projects:

Student Identification Project--senior *and* feeder junior high school counselors will identify the target population. Program information will be stored by computer and prior computerized and manual records will be analyzed. Students and parents will be interviewed through the Hispanic Education Fund and other school/community programming.

Incentive Activities Project--field trips and other extra-curricular activities will be available to participating students.

Orientation Project--prior to the beginning of the school year, program participants and their parents will be furnished with information related to the school's physical plant, procedures and policies, programs and activities as well as personnel. Student Government and a variety of organizations will assist with the orientation activities.

Both programs also have a tutoring project in which tutors are employed after school hours to teach math, English, social studies, and elective courses.

Instructional Core

As noted above, the two high schools' instructional approaches differ. Garfield High School uses a "team approach," whereas Roosevelt uses a "buddy system" approach:

> Students at Garfield High School will be given a core program that offers a Student Advocate teaching *team* as well as a coordination of coursework to provide continuity and consistency in instruction. Students will be programmed into four academic classes emphasizing Language Arts and Math. Classes will include English/Reading and Social Sciences under the Language Arts component and a correlation of Math and Science classes. With this type of program, teachers will be able to coordinate lesson planning, course emphasis, and

class activities as well as remediation. The existing Chapter I Program will provide teacher assistant services to the instructional program.

Teachers will function together as an inter-disciplinary team. With each teacher of this team having a different academic background, ideas and observations may be exchanged as to the student's strengths and weaknesses. . . . If possible, this team will share a common conference period so that constant communication for planning and student/teacher conferencing is possible.

The instructional approach at the Roosevelt High School will be conducted along the lines of a "buddy system." Here, individual Student Advocates will:

- visit the home on a regular basis
- phone home on the first day absent
- arrange for career counseling
- arrange trips to local colleges/universities, occupational centers/skill centers
- arrange for individual testing to diagnose students potential
- meet with his/her group on a regular basis
- bring parents closer to the school setting (i.e. take students to libraries, museums, cultural institutions)
- invite and encourage parents to participate in school activities
- be responsible for student attending tutorial classes
- develop profile of each student

Program Evaluation

The proposal calls for accurate records and objective evaluation. The former is attained by computerized attendance, grading, and counseling records, which are correlated to indicate potential dropout behavior. This pertinent information is especially critical during teacher/student/parent conferences.

For evaluation, both internal and external sources are used. Written program evaluations are expected after each major activity and at regular intervals for review by the community. The independent evaluating body, the Office of Education at California State University of Los Angeles, periodically reviews the program and advises the program administrators.

Recent Results

Lee Patterson, coordinator of the program at Garfield High School, reports that the team (or school-within-a-school) approach has worked "great." The evaluation reports have been positive, and the funding has been increased to accommodate more students. During its initial year (1984), the program served 150 students; this year, Garfield included 100 additional students. Next year, the program will serve over 400 students (almost 12 percent of the entire student body). Coca-Cola has also provided additional support services, such as photocopying, for the program.

Patterson believes that "industry is looking for a meaningful way to get involved in schools, and student retention is one way for them to tie into the community." She suggests that districts or individual high schools should approach large major companies or a combination of smaller companies to fund original or existing dropout prevention programs. The involvement of private companies in local schooling, she concludes, can help start (or at least supplement) effective alternative programs.

How These Three Programs Embody the Ten Characteristics of Effective Retention Programs

To the degree the three retention programs in Colorado, Oregon, and California described above have succeeded, it is because they incorporate the ten characteristics of effective retention programs described in the previous chapter. The following paragraphs point out specifically how each program manifests these characteristics, which, as we have seen, have been identified and recommended by researchers and practitioners.

Early Identification

Each program attempts to identify and help the potential dropout as soon as possible. The San Luis Valley Commission relies heavily on community meetings as a source for defining local conditions that contribute to dropping out and on peer tutoring. Eugene's Opportunity Center uses teacher and counselor recommendations in considering candidates for the program. The Hispanic Education Fund high schools, Garfield and Roosevelt, depend upon tracking attendance and credit problems in junior high school. Computerized recordkeeping facilitates this task.

Organization

All three programs are characterized by systematic planning and consistent application of program policies. This organiza-

tional structure, however, does not severely constrain the staff in dealing with students as individuals. This delicate balance is achieved by maintaining flexible and participatory governance and by keeping programs small. Both the San Luis Valley Commission and the Opportunity Center have explicit expectations about leadership style (democratic) and scale (small). Garfield and Roosevelt High Schools integrate these characteristics into smaller units in the larger organization via team teaching and the "buddy system."

Staff Selection

Although the San Luis Valley Commission makes extensive use of existing staff supplemented by voluntary personnel, the Opportunity Center and Hispanic Fund high schools take special care to hire teachers who can appreciate the potential dropouts' state of mind and are willing to work cooperatively with other staff members. Tom Owens, teacher at O.C., suggests that this feature is critical: "There must be a willingness to work together and a common 'we care' attitude. This atmosphere can be altered with any staff change." The O.C. staff holds two mandatory staff meeting each week to ensure that the faculty is working and thinking together.

Having the right personalities is important. Henry Ronquillo, principal of Roosevelt High School, maintains that it is essential to include teachers in the program who can work together and have been particularly successful in "reaching" at risk students.

Team Teaching and the "Buddy System"

All three programs use a combination of these two methods to provide more opportunities for one-on-one instruction and to give students access to positive adult role models. While team teaching has been established as an effective alternative to traditional methods of teaching, the "buddy system" (student-mentor relationships) is an effective method of socializing the student in the school. For example, Roosevelt High School uses student advocates to expose students "to community role models and provide tangible rewards and incentives for academic and attitudinal progress." The Opportunity Center assigns "group leaders" (staff members) to monitor the attendance and progress for a select group of students. In contrast, the San Luis Valley Commission uses peer tutoring as part of its "buddy system."

Specific Focus

Although all three programs attempt to prevent students from dropping out, each has its own unique focus. The San Luis Valley Commission draws upon local community concerns as a way of clearly defining its objectives and goals. The Opportunity Center emphasizes personal and school successes through group interaction, and the Hispanic Fund programs address the obstacles confronting the Hispanic community. These particular focuses make these programs distinct from general high school programs and increase their appeal to potential dropouts.

Student Selection

These programs are voluntary, yet they have little problem keeping their class rolls filled. (Waiting lists of 50-100 students are common.) Along with a supportive environment, these programs also have explicit expectations and student responsibilities. At the Opportunity Center, students must maintain 80 percent attendance; there are no "excused absences." In addition, students must have each teacher sign daily attendance slips and must turn those slips in at the end of the day. Jerry Blair suggests that this rule helps students become more accountable for their actions: "For a program to succeed, the students should want to be here; attendance is a way to measure their commitment to the program."

Role in the Institution

Although these alternative education programs are somewhat isolated from the general high school programs, they are not "unwanted step-children" of the larger institutions. Indeed, they have separate identities, but the majority of alternative faculty and staff see themselves as performing a vital service within the high school district.

Administrative Flexibility

Administrators of these three programs generally avoid making direct quantitative comparisons between their traditional and alternative programs. For example, Henry Ronquillo, principal of Roosevelt High School, suggests that a different mind set is needed when dealing with the potential dropout: "These programs serve students with needs different from the general high school population. For example, potential dropout students are usually the last ones to take advantage of necessary services." Administrators must be able to appreciate such factors when considering organizational policies and program budget allocations.

Community Involvement

Two of these student retention programs have sought the active involvement of their communities. The San Luis Valley Commission solicits contributions and support from community members and involves them in policy development through town meetings. The Hispanic Education Fund involves a large private firm, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Los Angeles, as a primary source of revenue. Both of these high schools encourage community involvement through career days and fairs. (In contrast, the Opportunity Center primarily involves program students and parents without promoting outside support.)

Substance Abuse Awareness

The designers of these programs are aware that substance abuse is a significant factor compounding the dropout problem. Instead of relying exclusively on other community agencies to spot substance abuse, these programs are active in recognizing substance abuse, referring students to appropriate community agencies, and establishing consistent procedures for handling substance abuse. For example, the Opportunity Center Handbook clearly specifies what constitutes substance abuse and what are the consequences of these actions. The other two programs use their close relationships with community drug abuse clinics to help control student use of drugs.

Conclusion

Approximately one out of every four students who enters high school will quit before graduating. Attempting to stem the tide of dropouts, educators in Oregon and across the nation have put into operation a number of worthwhile student retention programs. The preceding pages document the patience and resourcefulness of numerous educators and citizens in this state and elsewhere who have devised several of these programs. Nevertheless, given the enormity of the problem, these efforts must be considered only a start. Every school district and every community must explore the most effective means available to them of encouraging students to complete their education.

Research scholars and Oregon educators agree upon the value of early identification and timely intervention plans that account for individual student needs. One researcher notes that

> if guidance counselors and teachers can recognize potential dropouts, show them approval and love, provide educational experience they cannot get at home, ensure some degree of success in their work, and help them overcome their educational handicaps, they will save these children a great deal of unhappiness, frustration, and hostility. They may actually prevent them from one day making the tragic mistake of dropping out of school--into a life tinged with failure (Beck and Muia 1980).

Through a review of research and interviews with educators, ten characteristics of effective student retention programs were identified. These characteristics are as follows:

1. Students who are potential dropouts are identified early in their academic careers.

2. The organizational structure of the program is well-organized and advances realistic expectations.

3. The selection of appropriate staff is crucial to the success of the retention programs.

4. Innovative teaching and counseling methods, such as team teaching and the "buddy system," seem to work well with at risk students.

5. Programs with a specific focus tend to interest potential dropouts.

6. Programs select students who will voluntarily work within the program structure.

7. Students, faculty, and administrators appreciate the retention program's role within the institution.

8. The administration demonstrates flexibility and open-mindedness toward the program's operation and funding requirements.

9. Involvement of the community helps to enrich educational experiences for the students and to reinforce the relevance of education.

10. Awareness of substance abuse is built into the retention program, since drugs often compound dropouts' problems.

Although not uniformly present in all effective retention programs, these characteristics are found in the majority of these programs.

Adequate funding and studied implementation of dropout prevention programs are essential if the growing number of "nongraduates" is to be halted. Because dropping out is a problem that affects society as a whole, educators should not hesitate to draw on all resources of the community to promote solutions for the dropout phenomena.

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Doug Vicory, principal, Parkrose High School, Portland, Oregon. Interview, November 7, 1985.

HISTORY

The Opportunity Center opened its doors in the fall of 1970, making it the oldest of Eugene's alternative schools. The School Board and Superintendent, Millard Pond, gave Educational Services Department the assignment of creating a program for grades 8, 9 and 10 that would help keep students in school. The board was concerned because a number of that age students had come before the board for truancy and other disciplinary problems.

It has taken several years to develop the program into the viable program it is today. With few exceptions this was done within the same teacher-pupil ratio for staff and budget as other junior high programs. The real turning point that allowed O.C. to succeed in its purpose was the support given us by Special Educational staff members during the school year 1977/78. At that time two resource teachers and an aide were added to our staff.

During the 1982/83 school year we expanded our program to include a G.E.D. Preparation Program and a High School Completion Program. We have been very pleased with the success of these two programs. Our first graduation in June, 1984, awarded 45 G.E.D. Certificates and 20 High School School Completion Diplomas. Our June, 1985, graduation ceremony awarded 19 G.E.D. Certificates and 29 H.S.C. Diplomas. A waiting list of between 10 and 45students has become a necessary feature of our school.

PURPOSE

Our students come to us unhappy with their school experience. Many have a history of school failures. Many have become irregular in their attendance and some have not attended school for weeks or even months.

All entering students are given surveys in reading and math. If a student is significantly low in these areas our resource teacher will contact the parent, do more thorough testing and if warranted, develop a special skills program (I.E.P.). Our skills program shows an average yearly gain in reading of more than a year and similar gains in other areas.

A major goal is helping students experience personal and school success. We have achieved some of our most rewarding experiences in these areas. The atmosphere at O.C. is unique. It is a student oriented building with a warm, supportive and tolerant staff. The students like the staff and like being here.

RELATIONSHIP TO 4J DISTRICT

The Opportunity Center is a part of the 4J School District. Occasionally students from outside the district apply to the school. A few students have been able to work out arrangements for tuition waivers, but the general rule is that the program is open to only 4J students.

Our students come to us in several different ways; school social workers and counselors bring many in, while agencies such as juvenile court and shelter homes refer others to us. Some find their way to us by word of mouth.

Credits given to O.C. students are transferrable to other schools within the district. Every effort is therefore made to insure that students have a well balanced program that fulfills the requirements necessary to transfer back to other schools in the district or keep the option of high school completion open.

We also encourage students to study for and pass as many competencies as possible during their time with us.

SCHOOL POLICIES AND RULES

We try to keep rules and regulations to a minimum at O.C., but the following are some that parents or interested people might like to know about.

Attendance - One of the keys to success at O.C. is good attendance, therefore, we monitor attendance very closely. If a student's weekly class-by-class attendance falls below 80% he/she will be placed on probation. If the attendance is below 80% for two consecutive weeks, probation will be extended and a parent conference may be requested. If a High School Completion student is on probation four times in an 8-week period the student will be returned to his/her home school.

Group Leader - Each student is assigned a group leader upon enrolling. This group leader is a staff member who is responsible for keeping track of attendance and progress for each student in their group. If there is a question regarding attendance or how things are going for a student, please feel free to contact the group leader.

GRADES

We do not issue letter grades at O.C. Students receive full credit or no credit- depending on completion of work, participation and attendance. These credits may be transferred when the student moves to another school. O.C. operates on four week units. These short units allow us to enroll and transfer students with more ease. They are also designed to keep student interest at a high level. Evaluations are sent home at the end of each unit with a summary at the end of the year showing the students and parents exactly how many credits have been earned. The required High School Completion classes are the exception as they will last a full trimester (12 weeks).

TRANSPORTATION AND LUNCHES

School bus transportation is not available but we provide L.T.D. passes at half price. Students may purchase a monthly pass for $8.00. These may be purchased in the office on the last day of each month.

School lunches are transported from Spencer Butte Middle School and served from our kitchen. Lunches are $1.25. Many of our students qualify for free or reduced meals. Lunch forms are available in the school office.

FIELD TRIPS

Our programs involve as many field trips and outings as possible. The trips serve both educational and social purposes. Due to our large enrollment and more stringent transportation requirements, the overnight trips have been severely curtailed, but we still try to work in as many local trips as possible. Positive reinforcements for attendance and other positive behavior is usually rewarded with a school time pizza feed at a local restaurant. Any trip taking a student outside of the city will require a special permission slip signed by the parent. This form will also include supplies needed and cost of trip.

DISCIPLINE

Here at O.C. we try to take immediate action whenever a problem behavior occurs or seems imminent. Our first approach is always that of counseling. If a group leader or counselor feels it advisable, a conference is called and parents notified if appropriate. Definite limits and consequences are described on another page in this handbook. Because of these definite guidelines and expectations, we are able to avoid many disciplinary problems.

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CLASSES

Upon entering O.C., all students are given reading placement tests and a math survey. If deficiencies are noted further testing is done and students are placed in skills classes if needed. These skills classes are; reading, handwriting, expressive writing, spelling and math. Math is totally individualized, but in other skill areas small group interaction occurs. Students are grouped according to their specific needs. Individualized instruction occurs if necessary. If the student has no basic skill deficiencies, his/her schedule may be totally elective with the requirement that half of each schedule be in the academic areas - social studies, language arts, science and math.

As students reach 16 years of age or if a student is 16 when he/she applies for admission, they must choose one of our completion programs. They may enter either the G.E.D. Preparation Program or our High School Completion Program. These are described below:

G.E.D. Preparation Program

This program offers eligible students a chance to review basic skills (math, social studies, science, reading and writing) in preparation for taking the G.E.D. exams which are administered at Lane Community College. Successful completion of these exams makes it possible for a student to waive all high school credits and obtain a Certificate of Equivalency.

High School Completion Program

This program requires 22 courses plus completion of the competencies required by Dist. 4J. Twelve of the 22 classes will be required and the remaining ten will be elective. All credits earned toward graduation prior to entering the program either at a traditional high school or O.C. will be evaluated and applied to either elective or required classes.

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